

HAND OF THE WEEK

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Vol. 1 No. 32 Page 1

I played live bridge today for the first time in 16 months. As usual, in a club game there are a lot of mistakes made. And this particular club game was a qualifier for the North American Pairs. The most interesting hand involved a useful card play theme. It inspired me to create the following double dummy problem. It's not very hard, but after you solve it I am going to ask you to look at some defensive themes too.

North: ♠A109732 ♥A76 ♦953 ♣8

West: ♠QJ ♥108 ♦Q8742 ♣Q975 East: ♠K85 ♥J95 ♦J10 ♣KJ643

South: ♠64 ♥KQ432 ♦AK6 ♣A102

South to play 6♥ and make 12 tricks after the ♦4 lead. It's matchpoints, but that doesn't matter.

Note that ruffing clubs in dummy won't work. Say you win the ♦K, play ace and ruff a club, another diamond to hand, and ruff another club. Now you have a spade to lose and they can cash a diamond too. Even if the defense messes up, and wins the spade in East with no way to cash their diamond winner, you have no way to get rid of the diamond in your hand.

The key is to establish spades while retaining a late entry to dummy to cash them. Oh, and you need to make sure you have both minor suits controlled in your hand. Ponder on that for a while. I've inserted a page break, go to the next page when you think you have solved it.

No peeking!

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Vol. 1 No. 32 Page 2

The right idea is to win a diamond and play a spade, ducking when West plays one of his honors. West does best to play another diamond, but the same idea works whatever he plays. You win the next trick, cash the two high heart honors in hand, and NOW play a spade to the Ace and ruff a spade. Now a trump to the ace lets you throw away all your minor suit losers on the established spade.

This line is also your best chance to take 12 tricks in spades when you CAN'T see all 4 hands. In order to take 12 tricks you need both majors to split 3-2. And you also need West to have either the long spade (half the time), or for East to have both the long spade AND the long heart (a little less than half the remainder). And note that if East has the long spade and West the long heart, you will get overruffed and the defense will cash their diamond winner, you will still make 10 tricks.

OK, let's talk about defense for a while. Suppose you, as West, decide to lead a club rather than a diamond. South wins in hand and plays a spade, ducking in dummy. What do you do now? You need to play a club, allowing declarer to ruff in dummy. But by doing so, you are preventing him from taking 12 tricks, for there will no longer be a late trump entry to dummy.

Now suppose West has ♠Q8 and East ♠KJ5. Declarer wins the diamond in hand, draws two trumps with the K and Q, and leads a spade to the 10. What should East play after winning this trick? He should play a third trump, attacking the entry to the long spades. Declarer will actually go down in 4♠ by drawing two rounds of trumps early, because he will not be able to ruff any clubs in dummy and he will not be able to get rid of his diamond loser either.